

# **Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe: U.S. Helsinki Commission**

## **“Russia’s Assault on Ukraine and the International Order: Assessing and Bolstering the Western Response”**

### **Committee Members Present:**

**Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD), Chairman;  
Representative Steve Cohen (D-TN), Co-Chairman;  
Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS);  
Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member;  
Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH);  
Representative Marc Veasey (D-TX);  
Representative Robert B. Aderholt (R-AL);  
Senator Tina Smith (D-MN);  
Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI);  
Representative Ruben Gallego (D-AZ);  
Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC)**

### **Other Members Present:**

**Representative Victoria Spartz (R-IN)**

### **Witnesses:**

**Dr. Fiona Hill, Senior Fellow, Center on the United States and Europe,  
Brookings Institution;  
Lieutenant General (Retired) Ben Hodges, Pershing Chair, Center for  
European Policy Analysis;  
Ambassador (Retired) William B. Taylor, Vice President, U.S. Institute of  
Peace**

**The Hearing Was Held From 2:43 p.m. To 4:50 p.m., Room 562, Dirksen  
Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., Senator Ben Cardin (D-MD),  
Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

**Date: Wednesday, February 2, 2022**

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CARDIN: Well, welcome, everyone to the hearing of the United States Helsinki Commission. I want to welcome our two witnesses that are here in person and one who's with us virtually as we have this hearing on "Russia's Assault on Ukraine and the International Order: Assessing and Bolstering the Western Response."

We are starting a few minutes late and I apologize for that. The Senate is in a series of votes. The first vote has already taken place, but the senators will need to return to the floor at some time depending on when they call for the first vote. And I apologize to our witnesses about the interruptions that we're going to have as a result of votes, but we are going to continue the hearing. Chairman Cohen will be here, as I understand it. If we have to go vote – unless you have some votes coming up on your side also; I don't know –

COHEN: We are here.

CARDIN: So we'll be able to keep the hearing going.

Well, there's a lot unfolding in regards to Russia and Ukraine. The Biden administration made an announcement I believe today about the movement of troops into Europe so that they'll be at the disposal of NATO in order to assure our NATO allies of our commitment to their defense. The German national security advisor was in the United States this week and we had a chance to compare notes. And it's clear that there's a lot of unity between the United States and Europe as it relates to what is happening with Russia and Ukraine.

So today we gather as Europe stands on the precipice of war. The Kremlin has amassed an enormous array of troops and heavy weaponry at Ukraine's doorstep, demanding its submission to restore the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe. The Kremlin's threat menaces not only Ukraine, our partners in Georgia and the wider region, but also the long-cherished dream and longstanding bipartisan U.S. policy to work towards a Europe whole and free.

In contrast to Mr. Putin's bluster and blackmail, the Biden administration has responded with sophistication and determination. U.S. diplomats have met with Russian officials in good faith and with focused intent to avert war, and have sought to give Russia all the assurances it needs and more that the United States and its allies pose no danger to Russia if it abides by its own commitments and obligations. The United States stands ready to find areas of common purpose and cooperation with Russia if it is willing and sincere, but the sovereignty of the Ukraine and the freedom of Europe are not things to bargain away. In this, the United States, Ukraine, and Europe speak with one voice. We are united and we are resolute.

Last July, along with Ranking Member Wicker, Co-Chair Cohen, and Ranking Member Wilson, and a number of other commissioners, I had the opportunity to travel to Estonia, Bulgaria, and Norway. We saw in person the same unity of purpose across NATO's frontiers at the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Arctic. Although our shared enterprise is one of peace, the United States and our allies will not back down in the face of Kremlin's aggression, and we are ready to respond to any threat to peace and liberty of Europe.

That is why I'm proud to be an original cosponsor of the Defending Ukraine Sovereignty Act of 2022. The bill would provide our partners in Ukraine with the tools and equipment they need to defend themselves, bolster European security, combat disinformation, and would extend crippling sanctions on Russia's finance and energy sectors and on senior Russian government and military personnel. Along with other commissioners including Senator Shaheen, I am also currently involved in a bipartisan consensus-building exercise to develop a larger bill with wide bipartisan support that we hope will be introduced in the coming days. I want to congratulate Senator Menendez, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Senator Risch, the ranking Republican member, on their appearance on Sunday's talk show, but also their ability to work together so that we can have a consensus bill.

If the Kremlin chooses war, it will be at great cost to the regime and the Russian economy. However, it's not too late for the Russian government to pursue peace. As diplomatic talks continue, Russians have the opportunity to consider their place in Europe and in the world. The Kremlin may elect to make war on Europe and risk scathing international isolation, crushing economic penalties, and invite the full defensive power of the Euro-Atlantic to Eastern Europe; or Moscow can commit itself to diplomacy and its obligations under the Helsinki Final Act and we can forge a new future based on mutual respect, cooperation, human rights, and democracy. In this future, Russia would know no greater prosperity or global influence, and would be a contributor to international stability instead of a danger to international stability and prosperity.

It is certainly fitting that the Helsinki Commission is convening this hearing today. With the core tenets of the Helsinki Final Act so brazenly threatened, the importance of those principles and the central role of the OSCE could not be clearer. No other forum is so well-placed to allow for a direct and fulsome discussion of European security and the principles of human rights, sovereignty, and democracy. It's also the only multinational organization other than the United Nations where Russia, Ukraine, along with every member of NATO and the EU sit together at the same table. Whatever Russia's grievance about its place in Europe and the possible need to revisit the state of European security architecture, the OSCE is the most appropriate and purpose-built forum for such discussions.

I'm looking forward to a robust discussion with our witnesses, but first let me recognize my colleagues, the co-chair and ranking members, starting first with Co-Chairman Cohen.

COHEN: Thank you, Chairman Cardin, for scheduling this hearing, and it's a most important hearing to the world let alone the people here in the United States.

And thank you to our panelists for helping shed light on the situation. You all are both experts on the issues and have experience, which we and the American public need to hear.

The very fact that we're holding this critically important hearing is the unbelievable fact that we are at the stage of some type of a major possible war in Europe, something that should be left in the Dark Ages and not part of the future of mankind dealing with each other. We are confronted with the possibility of the largest land invasion in Europe since World War II, President Putin amassing over a hundred thousand troops – I guess 170,000, they're estimating

now – and military equipment on the border of Ukraine, a country that's trying to escape the legacy of Kremlin colonialism.

Putin is threatening the neighboring Ukrainians simply because they dare to pursue a path of democracy, accountable governance, and transatlantic integration. It's a developing democracy. It's not perfect, of course, but it's a developing democracy and can only become a better democracy if allowed to breathe and live and be free. The Kremlin wants to deny that sovereign nation that ability to exercise the will of its people and wants to stop it before it becomes more experienced with democracy and entrenched.

Let me be very clear: The Kremlin's rhetoric about Ukraine presenting a security threat to Russia is nothing more than a lie being used to force its own will on an independent European state. It's almost comical to think that when you bring 170,000 troops and all of the type of military equipment to the borders of a country that you're saying that that country is a security threat to Russia. It's absurd.

Moscow fears Ukraine's success as a budding democracy with its open market of ideas, vibrant media, and a strong civil society – all things which Russia lacks and that they fear will threaten their own system where they don't have an open society and where people like Mr. Navalny end up in prison. They don't have elections; they have prisons. Putin fears a successful Ukrainian experiment will lead the people of Russia to demand that autocrats like Putin leave office, they want transparency, and they want accountability. That's the only danger Ukraine presents to the corrupt clique of kleptocrats and oligarchs in the Kremlin. They certainly don't pose a military threat.

Let's not forget that Putin has been waging a war on Ukraine in Crimea, in the Donbas since 2014, the year of the Revolution of Dignity when Ukrainians took to the streets in favor of European integration over submission to Moscow, really a heroic period of time when people risked their lives for democracy, many of whom lost their lives, many of whom were injured, but they knew they wanted to be free. And they put it on the line, and they succeeded. Russia's illegal occupation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula is a nightmare for those who speak out against Russia's illegal presence there. And many Ukrainians continue to be persecuted for speaking out, particularly the indigenous Crimean Tatars. Thousands of Ukrainians have lost their lives defending their country against hostile Russian actions. We should not forget their sacrifices as we hold the Kremlin accountable.

The Kremlin has time and again used Ukraine as a testing ground for operations – be it cyberattacks, weaponization of energy, or proxy wars – that are later used against others, including the United States. This is as much about Europe and the free world as it is about Ukraine. We must not forget the lessons of history that has taught us the dangers of appeasing aggressors who are driven by egomania, a distorted perception of history, and lies.

This is about egomania and a desire to put one's self in history books along with others, all of whom got there with their military that lost their lives pursuing land accumulation and political accumulation of power for the egomaniac who wanted to be written down in a history book once they were put into the ground. It is my hope this Kremlin-manufactured crisis can be

resolved through diplomacy. A failure to do so will lead to the unnecessary loss of lives on both sides of this conflict. The Russians don't want to see their children come home in body bags, nor do the Ukrainians. Putin might not care, but most Russian people don't want to see it, and certainly the parents of the soldiers don't want to see it. And that could lead to additional consequences in the region, both calculable conflicts and others that may now be unforeseeable.

While I am neither a proponent nor an advocate for war, a free and sovereign Ukraine capable of defending its territorial integrity against current and future threats is the crux of security for the whole of Europe. He won't stop at Ukraine. He wants what Peter the Great had. He wants what the Soviet Union used to be. And that brings up our Baltic friends, our friends in Poland, our friends all along the border.

As friends to Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, the United States and all of Ukraine's allies should stand firm and unified in support of this crucial goal. So I wish to use this opportunity to express solidarity with the people of Ukraine. I have visited Ukraine on a couple of occasions. I found the people to be warm and inviting, who enjoyed the idea of freedom and don't want to go back under the yoke of a repressive oligarchical regime and kleptocracy. I know they will prevail. Their spirit will prevail. And the Russians are looking for trouble. Even if their tanks win, they will lose. Inevitably, they will lose.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

CARDIN: Thank you, Congressman Cohen.

I now recognize my co-leader in the Senate, Senator Wicker.

WICKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And our witnesses must certainly understand they'll eventually get to testify – (laughter) – but I do think it's important that we speak with solidarity here. And I want to congratulate Congressman Cohen and Senator Cardin for their very forceful remarks.

We're aware of the circumstances under which we're meeting. Ukraine is under imminent threat of an invasion from a massive military force assembled on its border by Putin's Russia. It could happen this week. It could happen any day. These forces threaten not only the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, but also they cause concerns for our friends in Poland and the Baltic states, and they cause concern for the United States. If you are concerned about our status in the world, if you are concerned about Taiwan, if you are concerned about a free Pacific, you are concerned about Ukraine today.

Russia's already using cyberattacks and information warfare against Ukraine, and we are warned that Moscow is likely or may very well stage a provocation as a pretext for military action. It certainly would not be the first time. Such a shameful tactic would echo Putin's own actions in the past, as well as those of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis when they began trying to subjugate large portions of Europe.

The Helsinki Commission is uniquely positioned for this conversation. After all, the Commission is tasked with monitoring the commitments made under the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, which served as a common foundation for acceptable behavior of European states and has promoted peace and security and prosperity. And I might mention that the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 was signed by the leadership of every member country, including the leadership of Russia at the time. They voluntarily entered into this agreement and they should be bound by it.

I want to mention what a stalwart Senator Cardin was after the invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014 in leading the resolution on the floor of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly pointing out that Putin's Russia had violated every single precept – every single precept – of the Helsinki Final Act, and that resolution was overwhelmingly, overwhelmingly adopted by our allies in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

I need not also mention Georgia in 2008, invaded illegally under a pretext invented by the Russian dictator, Vladimir Putin. Putin is now treading under foot the principles at the heart of the Commission's work, principles agreed to by Mr. Putin's predecessors in Moscow.

Colleagues, as you know, I recently traveled to Ukraine with a bipartisan group of senators, four Democrats and three Republicans. Based on what I heard there, I have no doubt the Ukrainians will fight fiercely to defend their sovereignty and their boundaries. I would say to my colleagues I did not see panic in the voices and in the eyes and the demeanor of our Ukrainian friends. I did see resolve, but not panic.

Our responsibility here is clear. We must do everything we can to deter the dictator, Putin, by making plain to him the costs of his brazen assault on an OSCE member country. Ronald Reagan called the Soviet Union the Evil Empire, and he was advised by diplomats – by some diplomats not to say this. It is a resumption of that Evil Empire that Vladimir Putin longs for and that he strives for, and it's the reason he's done what he's done in Transnistria. It's the reason he has done what he's done in the two provinces he's invaded in the Republic of Georgia. And it's the reason for his invasion and threatened invasion of the sovereign Ukrainian Republic.

Let me close by stressing two things. Nobody wants to see an escalation of the Ukrainian conflict. If it is escalated, it is because Mr. Putin has brought a hundred thousand troops in to the edge of the eastern part of Ukraine. It is because he has moved elite Russian troops from the far eastern parts of Russia to borders very dangerously close to the border of Poland and Belarus, to the border of Ukraine and Belarus.

What happens in Ukraine will not stop in Ukraine. How this crisis plays out will affect other countries in the region, including our NATO partners. Emergent powers around the world are watching closely what the United States does.

And I must make this final point to my colleagues, House and Senate. We have yet to update our national defense appropriation bill. There's talk about another continuing resolution. Members of the military leadership met with members of the Senate just this morning and talked about how inadequate a continuing resolution, keeping the appropriations where they were a year ago – a year-and-a-half ago instead of updating them as we know we have to do, how injurious

that is to our national security. I can't think of a better signal that the House and Senate could send than to resolve our differences about how much money needs to be spent on the domestic programs and on the defense programs and to get at least the defense portion of our appropriation bill updated and passed within the next few weeks. That would send, to me, a strong signal to Putin's Russia as well as the passage of legislation which members on both sides of the aisle are working on diligently.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

CARDIN: Well, first, let me just concur with Senator Wicker. I think the strongest message we could send right now is the passage of the budget – the appropriation bills so we don't do a CR. I agree completely. Plus, also, I hope the bipartisan bill in regards to unity giving this administration all the tools they need and a clear message to Mr. Putin of the consequences if he invades further into Ukraine.

We'll now recognize the Republican leader from the Helsinki Commission in the House, Representative Wilson.

WILSON: Thank you, Chairman Cardin. Thank you for convening this hearing and thank you for your bipartisan leadership as you just indicated how important that is that the world recognize that Republicans and Democrats stand together.

It's never been more urgent to understand the threats to Ukraine, not only militarily but on the humanitarian level. Conflict breaking out between these two nations would result in a needless and horrific loss of Russian and Ukrainian life. Russian families would suffer again. The world must not repeat the consequences of a European cross-border occasion as occurred in 1939 by Hitler into Poland, ultimately resulting in 27 million dead in the Soviet Union, 8 million dead in Germany, and the genocide of over 6 million Jews. Americans appreciate that German Ambassador to the United States Emily Haber has been outspoken for the people of Ukraine.

I was grateful to join a bipartisan congressional delegation to Ukraine in December to hear firsthand from Ukrainians about the situation on the ground and their needs and expectations for the future. The Kremlin must pay attention to these meetings. Putin should know by now that both parties in the U.S. Congress are firmly united in support of the people of Ukraine as we see so clearly today of Democrats and Republicans and so well expressed, and not surprisingly by Senator Roger Wicker being correct again.

And not only Ukraine, but any country that has been invaded/occupied such as Georgia and Moldova, or coerced by the Kremlin, and all those living under threat from Putin such as the Baltic republics of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, along with adjoining Belarus. Putin's tyrannical decisions continue to damage the reputations of the talented people of Russia. There should be no repetition of the 1932 Red Famine, where Stalin starved 4 million Ukrainians along with 1 million in Kazakhstan and the Volga region as documented by Anne Appelbaum. Where we stand in Ukraine in this decisive moment has serious implications.

With my visits over the years, I've been impressed by the city of Kyiv with its energized people. Western democracies must be bold. I continue to call for sending advanced anti-tank, anti-aircraft, and anti-ship missiles to Ukraine for maximum defense of their freedom. Since the siege of Leningrad in World War II, where Russian citizens with American equipment successfully stopped the Nazi invaders, this country continues the great tradition of America providing military aid to its allies opposing invaders. At the end of the siege of Leningrad, over 800,000 Russian lives were lost in the city, and more – that's more than the United States and United Kingdom lost in all of World War II.

I was inspired and humbled to lead an American delegation in presenting a floral wreath at the Piskaryovskoe Memorial Cemetery in St. Petersburg in honor of the 500,000 Russians who are buried there, their lives taken, and recognized as the world's largest open cemetery. History cannot be forgotten. Putin should recognize a murderous invasion will be disastrous for all. Putin and his cronies should stop silencing and exploiting their populations for personal enrichment.

We've already seen the toll Putin's occupation has taken on Crimea and the Donbas – restrictions on freedom of speech and religion, punishment for asserting Ukrainian identity. All these things would be implemented further into Ukraine should Putin capture more territory. Millions more lives would be upended. And needless deaths, including civilians, would be inevitable. Let us not only hope that further tragedy can be avoided, but work to do what we can to bolster Ukraine's defenses against Putin.

I look forward to learning from our witnesses today what is happening in the region, particularly how the American people can continue to support a trusted partner, the people of Ukraine, in these troubling times. I'm also hopeful that the Russian people to continue to respect international treaties and boundaries, even though the Kremlin does not. I'm grateful that today The Washington Times published an op-ed, "Why Ukraine Matters For The American People," and the families of Germany, Japan, Korea, Israel, and India.

And with this, I, again, appreciate the witnesses today, and I yield back.

CARDIN: Let me thank all my colleagues for their comments. I also want to acknowledge that we have Senator Shaheen, Representative Veasey, Representative Aderholt who are with us. And online we have Senator Smith, Representative Moore, and Representative Gallego. Large attendance because of the subject matter and our distinguished panel of witnesses.

So let me introduce our witnesses. And we welcome your testimony. Your full testimony is being made part of the record and you'll be permitted to proceed as you wish, and then we'll do rounds of questioning.

Dr. Fiona Hill is a senior fellow in the Center of the United States and Europe in the foreign policy program at Brookings. She recently served as deputy assistant to the president and senior director for European and Russian affairs at the National Security Council from 2017 to 2019. From 2006 to 2009, she served as national intelligence officer for Russia and Eurasia at



the National Intelligence Council. She's co-author of "Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin," and has researched and published extensively on issues related to Russia, the Caucasus, Central Asia, regional conflicts, energy, and strategic issues. She's a true expert on the subject matter.

We're also joined by Lieutenant General Ben Hodges. He's joining us virtually, I believe from Germany. He is lieutenant general, retired; holds the Pershing Chair in Strategic Studies at the Center for European Policy Analysis. He joined CEPA in February of 2018. A native of Quincy, Florida, General Hodges graduated from the United States Military Academy in May of 1980 and was commissioned in the infantry. He has served in so many places, including Iraq and Afghanistan. And I believe he is recently back from Ukraine.

Ambassador, retired, William Taylor is the vice president of Russia and Europe at the U.S. Institute for Peace. In 2019, he served as the chargé d'affaires at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv. During the Arab Spring he oversaw U.S. assistance and support in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria. He served as U.S. ambassador to Ukraine from 2006 to 2009. He earlier served on the staff of Senator Bill Bradley. We always mention the most important parts of your resume, if you have connections to the United States Senate. He graduated from West Point and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Served our nation in Vietnam and Germany, and was recently also back, I believe, from Ukraine.

So we'll start first with Dr. Hill.

HILL: Thank you so much, Chairman Cardin, Co-Chairman Cohen, and all the other members of the Commission. It's a real privilege and an honor to be with you today, especially, as you've all pointed out, what's happening in Ukraine is very much at the forefront, at the heart of everything that this Commission does. And so I'm delighted that you are having these hearings, and very honored to be able to participate alongside my colleagues, Lieutenant General Hodges and Ambassador Taylor.

As Co-Chairman Cohen has already pointed out, I think you used exactly the same word as I was going to begin my oral remarks, Congressman. The current phase of this crisis in Ukraine has been manufactured by Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin. And I think for all of us, it's quite difficult to identify a specific trigger for the decision to build up forces to such an extent on the borders close to Ukraine, or to suddenly escalate events in December of last year. In many respects, the timing seems driven more by Vladimir Putin's own political predilections and perceptions of developments rather than by events on the ground in Ukraine, or in the contested Donbas region. So I will just give a few overview points for us to take into consideration, before hearing more from my colleagues.

So in terms of understanding the current context for the crisis, there are several factors at play for Moscow and Putin that I think are relevant for us to consider during this hearing. First of all, Moscow has actually successfully reasserted itself as the dominant political force and security provider in Eurasia. In contrast with Ukraine currently, the other former Soviet states have now either been pressured into closer political and security relations with Moscow, or into a more neutral, marginal international status. Just as a couple of examples, you already mentioned

actually Moldova and some of the other republics here, but I'll just offer a couple of key examples from the last couple of years.

In Georgia, for example, 14 years after Russia's August 2008 invasion, the current government is, I would say, more on the backfoot than it has been before, treading very carefully with Russia, more so than its predecessors. Georgia's former president, Mikheil Saakashvili, who was a perennial thorn in Moscow's side, now sits in jail in Tbilisi after an ill-advised return to Georgia in October 2021. Although Russia can't claim direct credit for this, Russian officials nonetheless and commentators frequently use Saakashvili and his fate as a cautionary tale for the rest of the region, including Ukraine.

In summer 2020 in Armenia, President Nikol Pashinyan – another leader who's fallen out of favor with Moscow – saw his domestic position and former foreign policy autonomy crushed by the war with Azerbaijan. Given the fact that Russia and Armenia have a long-standing defense pact, and Russian forces are permanently based in Armenia, Azerbaijan's military assault to retake territory occupied by Armenia for the last three decades was unlikely to have been feasible without a greenlight from Moscow. And Russia has now exploited the 2020 war to introduce its military forces into Nagorno-Karabakh, sidelining the OSCE Minsk Group.

Elsewhere, Belarusian strongman Aleksandr Lukashenko has been forced back into the fold after a disastrous presidential election on his part in the last year. And in January 2022, so just in the last month, Russia and its regional security alliance – the Collective Security Treaty Organization, or CSTO, were of course called in to quash protests and to quell a political power struggle in Kazakhstan. This was the first time that the CSTO was deployed on the territory of a member country. So Russia feels emboldened by all of these developments in Eurasia.

From Russia's perspective, the United States played no significant role in addressing these upheavals. And the United States, again, from Russia's perspective, seems grievously weakened at home and abroad. For Vladimir Putin – again, this is his view – America's political disarray mirrors Russia's predicament immediately after the dissolution of the USSR and offers a rare opportunity. If the United States really is in a state of collapse at home and in retreat abroad, as the Putin and the Kremlin assesses, then in Putin's view, again, perhaps Russia can overturn the last 30 years of American dominance in European security, and also constrain Ukraine's independence.

If we look at Europe, not just at Eurasia, Moscow now sees ample opportunity to take advantage of developments there – the reverberations from Brexit; Poland and Hungary's disputes with the EU — of course, we've just seen Viktor Orbán in Moscow meeting with Vladimir Putin directly. The legacy of four years of rifts between the United States and its European allies; the departure of long-serving Germany Chancellor Angela Merkel from the political scene; preparations for presidential elections in France; and Washington's precipitous withdrawal from Afghanistan have exacerbated frictions and fractures in NATO and the EU that Russia thinks it can exploit.

And again, from Russia's perspective, there's an opportunity because European military spending and operational readiness have declined over the last decades, relative to the United

States and Russia. And despite an uptick in spending and deployment since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, two of our most significant European military partners – the U.K. and France – are increasingly at loggerheads, while our other major partner, Turkey, is preoccupied with Syria and the Middle East.

Again, from Russia's perspective, Europe's punitive financial tools, along with the political will to deploy them, have been weakened. Moscow has effectively moved over the past decade, and especially since its annexation of Crimea in 2014, to shore up the Russian economy against Western sanctions, including through paying off state debts, making strategic direct investments in companies across Europe in critical infrastructure, energy, and metallurgy, and also by deepening ties with the private sectors of key European countries, even at the height of this crisis, to try to offset any retaliatory economic actions that we might take.

Putin and the Kremlin clearly believe that European and American investors will serve as Russian allies and advocates for limited sanctions, and that they will push for a speedy reconciliation with Russia, limiting our government's capacity for confrontation.

Putin has also, as members of the Commission are well aware, taken Russia's ambitions and positions during this crisis well beyond Eurasia and Europe. Russia is consolidating relationships with U.S. adversaries with the blatantly signaled goal of challenging America's global posture. We've seen this with recent visits to Iran by Putin, and of course we're soon going to be seeing Vladimir Putin sitting alongside President Xi at the opening of the Beijing Olympics. And there have been many other instances where Putin has clearly moved out into other theaters to signal that Russia means business there as well.

Putin's been quite explicit about these moves, as well as about the ideas of deploying new nuclear weapon systems to parts of territory closer to Europe, or perhaps even to the Caribbean, under some recent commentary out of Moscow. And its whole goal here seems to be to undermine the current international order, or at least to show an intent to do so, as a gambit to get the United States to the negotiating table. As members of the Commission have already stated, Russia has long sought a commitment from the United States, NATO, and the European Union that it will have a clearly defined role in post-Cold War European security institutions, and also decision-making power whenever developments or events run counter to its interests.

Russian officials have recently expressed frustration about the slow response from the United States to Moscow's repeated requests to engage on proposals for a new European security order. And in many respects, Putin is pushing this really hard because of his own timeline. So just again something to bear in mind, Putin's very mindful of 2024, not just when we have our presidential election but also when he must, theoretically as well as in practice, submit himself for reelection at home to then gain the presidency for perhaps another six to even 12 years, depending on how many terms he sees before him at this particular juncture.

So in many respects, time is of the essence for Putin. He would like to achieve a resolution of these issues before 2024. And right now, his public opinion ratings are not what they used to be. The last time Putin's popular approval fell significantly was just before the annexation of Crimea back in 2014. At that juncture, annexation proved universally popular in

Russia, and Putin may hope for a similar boost ahead of the Russian presidential elections by showing the Russian people that he can take decisive action against Ukraine, NATO, and the United States.

In the meantime, at home Putin has done a very good job in Russia of making the United States and NATO look like the aggressors in the perpetration of this crisis. Abroad, he's also bent on convincing the rest of the world that Ukraine is either an internal matter for Russia to resolve, or the object of a Cold War-style dust-up with the United States. It's Putin that's trying to depict this as a proxy war, like Korea and Vietnam were in the Cold War. But however, in recent Russian polling, half of Russians believe that the United States and NATO were to blame for the crisis, and only a tiny fraction that Russia itself was to blame. But across the border in Ukraine, in stark contrast, more than 70 percent of Ukrainians now view Russia as a hostile state, which has increased from 60 percent in spring of 2021.

And I would just offer to the Commission – and, again, I'd be very interested to hear with Lieutenant General Hodges and Ambassador Taylor have to say about this after their recent visit to Ukraine – that this last point about Ukrainian attitudes could prove very problematic for Putin. The Russian president knows history inside-out – Russian history, that is. But he also has his very own version of it, that isn't always shared not only by us, but also by Ukrainians. The Kremlin and Putin have long deployed Russian values and Russian history as weapons in their conduct of information warfare, especially when it comes to Ukraine. And Putin has, of course, asserted that Russia and Ukraine are historically, culturally, linguistically, and inextricably tied together. He posits that they've only been separated by an accident of history, the collapse of the Soviet Union.

And in this narrative context for Putin, this is why we're in this crisis. The mere prospect of any kind of formal relationship between Ukraine and NATO, or between Ukraine and the EU, or Ukraine and the United States is considered a direct threat to Russia. And also to Putin personally, because every aspect of the Ukraine conflict is being made personal for him. He's talked repeatedly about his own connections to Ukraine and to Crimea, and every move has so far been on his timetable, and every Russian official and commentator stressed that the ultimate decision making in Ukraine is up to Vladimir Putin, as well as the small group of people in his inner circle who share his own views.

But in acting against Ukraine, Putin and Russia look set to create an eternal enemy out of this neighboring country, as well as destabilizing European and global affairs for years to come, especially if Ukrainian views that Russia is engaged in hostile acts are really as high as they seem to be in the polls. And this is where something interesting should be borne in mind and reflects what Congressman Wilson said in his references to World War II, about some of the impacts of hostile acts. Even Putin himself has reflected upon the fact, at the beginning of his presidency, that acts of aggression against another country, no matter what their motivation, whatever the intent, have lasting consequences.

When he was asked by a journalist at the very beginning of his presidency in 2000 whether the Soviet interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 or in Germany in 1953 were big mistakes. He said, yes, they were. They were all big mistakes, in my opinion.

And the Russophobia that we have today in Eastern Europe, that's the result of those mistakes. That was Vladimir Putin in the year 2000. Well, in 2022, twenty-two years exactly to when he made these comments, the Russophobia or negative attitudes towards Russia today in Ukraine and elsewhere are the direct result of Russian military intervention, cyberattacks and intrusions, and political influence operations that we've seen since the 2000s.

So in closing, in countering Putin on this occasion, we have to continue to keep demonstrating to Putin that today's actions in and around Ukraine are a significant mistake, just as they were in the 1950s and 1960s. We should continue to make clear to Moscow that we are open to negotiation, as Chairman Cardin has said, and other members have, but not under the current coercive circumstances. We need to reframe this crisis for what it is, as the administration has just done in the United Nations. This is not a proxy conflict. This is not aggression by the United States or NATO. This is not a righteous effort to counter some great historic wrong, as President Putin says. This is an act of post-colonial revisionism on the part of Russia. Ukraine's been an independent country for more than 30 years.

Many other countries, as you have said, Chairman Cardin, and other members have said, have – find themselves in similar predicaments today, also threatened by territorial assaults from their neighbors, or having their sovereignty threatened. Senator Wicker also made this reference before he left. And we need to keep making it very clear that any further invasion of Ukraine is unacceptable.

CARDIN: Thank you, Dr. Hill. Appreciate your testimony. I do want to acknowledge that Representative Spartz has joined us. And it's nice to have you here. Not a member of the Commission, but you're always welcome to our – to our hearings.

We'll now hear from General Hodges, who I believe is in Germany, which means the time difference there is getting late at night. So we very much appreciate you being with us virtually.

HODGES: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. And greetings from Frankfurt, Germany. Thanks for the privilege, to all of you, to provide testimony today. I have just returned from a short trip to Kyiv as part of a delegation of five former ambassadors, including my co-panelist Ambassador Bill Taylor and former Supreme Allied Commander General, retired, Phil Breedlove. Our visit to Ukraine included a private meeting with President Zelensky, as well as with several members of the Ukrainian Rada, ministers, and military officials.

President Zelensky is not confused about the threat. He knows it is very real, and that the survival of his government and of his country are at stake. He differs with the United States government as to the scale of what a new Russian offensive will look like, but he has no illusions about the threat. President Zelensky's aim is to grow the size of his armed forces by 100,000 soldiers over the next three years. And for that, he needs financial resourcing. He is not asking for any soldiers from any nation.

He only asks for the financial resources to build his own army, for weapons and ammunition, and for continued diplomatic and economic support from the West.

The threat from Russia is real and it is growing. While a new Russian offensive is not imminent, I fear it is increasingly likely. There is no sign of de-escalation. President Putin appears over-confident. He is applying maximum pressure on the West in this self-manufactured crisis, in hopes that Ukraine and/or NATO will eventually make concessions.

What is at stake? As German Foreign Minister Baerbock recently stated, it is the entire European peace order. Stability and security in the transatlantic area are endangered if Putin can enlarge Russia's territory at will, without regard for international law, existing treaties, and borders. A failure of deterrence would further open the door to the Russian way of war, with cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, aggression in the air and maritime domains, targeted assassinations and the weaponization of Russian-controlled energy resources.

A new influx of potentially tens of thousands of refugees into Western Europe would have destabilizing effects across Europe, which is one of the Kremlin's intended outcomes of such an attack. I do not believe that a large-scale attack towards Kyiv is likely, as it will generate too many Russian casualties and it's not actually necessary for them to achieve their strategic aims. Instead, I anticipate that a new offensive will be a continuation of what they are already doing. A new offensive is more likely to be a series of rolling, limited objective operations to, number one, demonstrate that the Kremlin is not deterred by NATO, two, to further weaken the government of Ukraine and, three, to frustrate Western decision-makers with actions below some perceived threshold of violence that might make going forward with the most severe sanctions more difficult.

This administration deserves credit for leading perhaps the most comprehensive U.S. diplomatic effort I have seen since the 1995 Dayton Peace Accord. Although there are still significant differences among some nations about how to respond, every NATO country has agreed to reject the Kremlin's ridiculous demands, although recent unhelpful statements by Hungary's Prime Minister Orbán and Croatia's president are cracks that the Kremlin will exploit. The administration and NATO have transitioned from passive deterrence to active deterrence, as evidenced by the heightened alert of the NATO response force, today's welcome announcement of U.S. troop deployments to Europe, other nations delivering weapons, and even France has offered to lead a new battlegroup into Romania.

Not all of our allies have been as decisive as they should, Germany foremost among them. Germany is the key. Most of the European Union will follow Germany's lead on most diplomatic and economic sanctions. Therefore, I am frustrated that Germany, our most important ally, has not yet acted decisively regarding Nord Stream 2. But I do note that the German government has publicly acknowledged, at least, that Russia is the aggressor and that, quote "everything is on the table" as an option for sanctions should Russia attack. These are positive steps. And I believe that leaders within the Green Party are particularly helpful.

The Biden administration must continue to work closely with the German government to ensure we remain unified in our assessment of the Russian threat, and in our response. Therefore, we need to understand the domestic political challenges facing this new German coalition government, and seek alternative sources of gas to mitigate the threat of Russia disrupting gas supplies to Europe, which the administration is now doing. A partnership between

Germany and the United States, which ensures a strong, unified effort in all domains, is what will ultimately give the Kremlin the greatest pause.

What else can the alliance do to prevent a new Russian offensive against Ukraine? We need to take the initiative instead of always reacting to whatever the Kremlin does. But we have to do this in unity with our allies. We need to realize that this is about so much more than Ukraine. We need a strategy for the greater Black Sea region. And we must repair the damaged relationship with Turkey, which holds the key to the region. In the near-term, we should be doing everything possible to enable Ukraine to more effectively defend itself. I'm happy with most of what the administration is already sending. We just need to get it there faster, especially air defense and anti-ship capability.

We must be prepared to escalate horizontally to force the Kremlin to look in other directions versus being able to focus fully on its operations in Ukraine, such as threatening the Kerch Strait Bridge and the Russian Navy's illegal base at Sevastopol. We should encourage Turkey to close the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits to Russian Navy vessels, in accordance with its authority under the Montreux Convention. And we should let it be known that we are seriously prepared to blockade the Russian Navy base at Tartus in Syria. I fully support administration's plans to enact sanctions targeting President Putin's personal wealth and to remove Russia from SWIFT. We must continue competing in the information domain by countering false Kremlin-backed narratives, such as that NATO is a threat to Russia.

Finally, the West should build an offramp for President Putin. There are things we can do which will not in any way betray Ukraine, our allies, or any of our values, but could give President Putin an opportunity to draw back his forces. For example, we should double down on exercise transparency and offer to re-establish the mutual military special observer missions which existed during the Cold War. NATO members could make a public joint statement where member states guarantee Russia's internationally recognized borders. We have already done this. In effect, for decades NATO has been guaranteeing Russia's border. And on its face, it seems almost ludicrous for Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia to have to guarantee that they would never invade Russia. But maybe because it does seem so ludicrous, making a public event out of it might help counter the false narrative of Russia being threatened by NATO.

Of course, the alliance should still keep communication channels open with the Kremlin in every possible format. But we must have a clear-eyed perspective about the nature of diplomacy with the Kremlin. These are not Boy Scouts. They use chemical weapons, poison and murder against their own opposition, and they use cyber and disinformation to destroy lives and trust in our democratic system. We should talk, but we need to understand with whom we are talking. I look forward to your questions. And thank you, again, for the privilege of testimony today.

CARDIN: General, thank you for your testimony and making yourself available. We appreciate it very much. I want to acknowledge also that Senator Tillis is with us vis-à-vis the internet.

We'll now hear from Ambassador Taylor.

TAYLOR: Chairman Cardin, Co-Chairman Cohen, and other members of the Commission, it's a great honor for me to join you here today. It's a great honor for me to be here with Dr. Hill and General Hodges. As General Hodges said, he and I spent some time in Kyiv over the past weekend. Just got back yesterday afternoon. We'd be glad to talk to you about what we saw there.

The United States and the rest of NATO and Ukraine face a challenge from the Russian Federation that threatens stability and security in Europe and the world. If President Putin decides to invade Ukraine, it will drastically escalate a war that has already killed 14,000 Ukrainians and will result in the deaths of tens of thousands more, thousands of Russian soldiers. As President Putin considers his options, he should remember that in addition to the crippling cost of sanctions and heavy losses on the battlefield, attacking and killing civilians is a war crime.

As you have heard from Dr. Hill and General Hodges, Mr. Putin is making demands that he knows the United States and the rest of NATO and Ukraine will never agree to. President Zelensky and President Biden have firmly rejected those demands. President Zelensky and Biden are not backing down in the face of Putin's saber rattling. They are not compromising principle. And they are not blinking.

Mr. Chairman, I believe President Putin will blink. I think Presidents Biden and Zelensky are staring him down successfully. Putin appears, for now, to be seeking negotiations. The strong measures taken by Ukraine, NATO and the United States appear to have deterred an invasion, at least for now. However, until Mr. Putin withdraws the large military force from Ukraine's borders and sends it back to normal duty stations, we should continue to take the strong steps that seem to have deterred an invasion so far.

Mr. Putin seems to be coming around to the conclusion that negotiations are a better option than invading. The United States, NATO, Ukraine, and the rest of Europe are ready to sit at the negotiating tables to discuss ways to improve the security of NATO, Russia, and Europe. Placement of nuclear missiles, size and location of military exercises, confidence-building measures – these can all be discussed. Some of these issues have already been the subject of negotiations between the United States and Russia since last summer.

What is not subject to negotiation is the sovereignty of any nation, including and especially Ukraine. The United States, its allies and Ukraine have been rock-solid on this principle. Sticking to that firm stance, backed by credible threats of heavy military and financial costs, seems to have worked.

Why do I think Mr. Putin has decided not to invade for now? His statements yesterday suggest that he wants to negotiate. He has complained about, but has not rejected, the responses from the United States and NATO to his demands. His officials have indicated that they are still studying the responses, that further exchanges of papers and further conversations can happen. Mr. Lavrov has asked all 57 nations of the OSCE to answer a vague question about the



indivisibility of security. The negotiations in the Normandy Format among Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and France have restarted.

The strong united stand of Ukraine, Europe, and the United States seems to have deterred an invasion for now. They should continue until all Russian forces are back in their peacetime posts. Mr. Chairman, you and members of this Commission today have explained the importance of abiding by the principles of sovereignty that have kept Europe free of major wars for 69 years, until Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014. Until Russia recommit to those principles and accepts Ukrainian sovereignty and withdraws from its territory, Europe and the world will not be secure.

Ukraine matters for another reason. Even though it is an old civilization and culture – centuries older than Russia, by the way – it is a young democracy of 45 million people, the vast majority of whom seek nothing more than the ability to live a normal life as a normal European country. Able to choose their leaders. Able to choose their trading partners. Able to choose their security alliances. Able to choose their political partners. They find themselves on the frontline of a war they didn't start. They are fighting Russia on our behalf. Like American soldiers and military who fight on behalf of all American citizens, Ukraine is fighting Russia on behalf of Europe and the United States. It is the frontline of the battle between democracy and autocracy. We should support them. With that support, they will prevail. Putin will lose.

Glad to answer your questions.

CARDIN: I want to thank all three of our witnesses. I found your testimonies to be extremely helpful. It fills in some of the blanks. I'm going to turn the gavel over to Congressman Cohen. The Senate, as I indicated earlier, has two votes scheduled now. I will be returning shortly. So with that, we'll start a five-minute round, and Chairman Cohen will have the gavel.

COHEN: Thank you, Senator Cardin. I also thank each of the witnesses for their testimonies. It's been quite enlightening. And I'll start the questioning myself.

Dr. Hill, you've done much of your work on the Soviet Union, but also on Putin. To some extent, he's already won, in that he's been on stage, and he'll be on stage again in Beijing. How much do you think he has to win before he goes further and engages in some type of military activity? And can he accept taking his forces away from Ukraine without having incurred on their land and still consider it to be a victory?

HILL: Thank you very much, sir, for that question. Congressman, I'm sure that Ambassador Taylor and Lieutenant General Hodges may have some views on this as well. I think from Putin's perspective, he already has had something of a win, because he's got our undivided attention. And part of the exercise was clearly to get us to focus on him. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, and I've also said so in the paper that I submitted ahead of time, Putin and others around him have been very frustrated that from their perspective they haven't been able to have a big sit-down with the United States – the United States in particular –

to, in effect, go over and perhaps even have a redo of the European security arrangement since the end of the Cold War.

They've made it very clear that the current arrangement for the OSCE is not sufficient, because of course that gives equal standing to every member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, no matter the size of the country or, you know, the significance of their military. And they've been looking for decision-making or veto power. If we look back to 2008, when Vladimir Putin was at that point sort of standing behind the shoulders of President Medvedev – Putin was, of course, the prime minister and had stepped aside for a period before coming back again — Dmitry Medvedev made a visit to Berlin in the early part of 2008 and made a pitch, an open request then, for a rethinking and a revision, a refurbishment of European security arrangements. From the Russian perspective, we didn't pick this up because, in effect, what they were looking for was almost an overturning of the Helsinki Final Act, and of the OSCE, and looking for something more along the format that we'd seen in earlier centuries, for of a concert of Europe of the big powers. Essentially the U.S. and Russia sitting down and resolving, you know, the repositioning of forces, as well as the various institutional arrangements of Europe. So Putin's still looking for that.

So I think what Ambassador Taylor was saying, is that Putin is saying that they're still considering, they're still reviewing, this strange ask of all countries a kind of a question about the indivisibility of security to all of the member states of the OSCE is very telling. They're kind of looking for something here that Putin will be able to say, look, I got everyone's attention, I've got everyone to resolve this question or address this question of security. I've got everyone to the negotiating table. I don't suspect that it'll sufficient to have just the responses from all 50-plus members. Putin will want to be seen to be sitting down with President Biden in some fashion, just like he already did in Geneva and again during the various telephone or telecommunication sessions, just like, you know, the set pieces that they've had at NATO and in other settings.

But Putin is looking for something to show that his interests have been addressed in some fashion. If, however, he feels that they have not – and I think this is where Ambassador Taylor and Lieutenant General Hodges have got their finger on – he will continue to keep escalating. And that's where we might see some steps forward, perhaps along the lines that Lieutenant General Hodges has laid out. So I think for us right now, it's all in the art of the diplomacy, and in a way that we can be able to show to Putin that the incredible cost that he's incurred – because it hasn't been cost free in moving all these troops from the Russian far east. I mean, this is logistically a major effort – these costs have paid off in some way.

COHEN: Do either of you have a response, or General Hodges – (off mic).

TAYLOR: Mr. Cohen, I'm glad to. I also would be – why don't I go forward, and then – and General Hodges can chime in?

COHEN: (Off mic.)

TAYLOR: I agree with Dr. Hill. That is, he has been deterred so far. It has been expensive for him. And the right question is the one you asked, Mr. Cohen. And that is, what did he get for this? Or what can he get for this? How can he back down, not invade Ukraine, and still say to the Russian people that he got what he wanted? Well, he clearly is not going to get one of the things – indeed, the core thing that he says he wants. And that is infringement on Ukrainian sovereignty and the closing of NATO's open door. He's not going to get that. It's very clear.

However, as Dr. Hill just said, he's going to get an opportunity to negotiate with President Biden, with NATO, with the rest of Europe in the OSCE. And he will be able to say, exactly as Dr. Hill just said, look, I've been complaining about the fact that the West has not taken my security concerns seriously. They haven't taken into account my concerns. Well, I've finally gotten them to do that, he can say to the Russian people. And they're sitting down with me and having this conversation. Mr. Chairman, I think that's OK. It's fine for him to say that. He didn't get the principle – he didn't get us to violate the principle of sovereignty. He didn't get to close NATO's open door. He got to sit down and talk. That's fine. He can convince the Russian people that that's a win.

COHEN: Thank you, sir. General Hodges, do you have anything that you'd like to add? (Comes on mic.) General Hodges, do you have anything you'd like to add?

HODGES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me say this, of course President Putin had a seat with all the leaders of the world when he used to be a part of the G-8. But he's now – it's now the G-7, and he lost his seat because of his behavior and illegal conduct. Has he won, at huge risk? I want to slightly disagree with Dr. Hill, who I've respected for years. What has he achieved? NATO is more vigorous today than it has probably been in probably the last 20 to 25 years.

There are other nations in the queue to join NATO. Finland and Sweden are openly talking about it's their right to decide whether or not they want to join NATO, unthinkable even just a couple years ago. Sweden has put troops back on Gotland Island in the Baltic Sea. There are very bright lights now shining in the dirty money in London real estate belonging to various oligarchs in Russia. And more and more nations now are increasingly energy independent and looking for ways to get themselves off of dependence on Russian gas. I'm not sure he is quite the genius that he is sometimes made out to be.

And of course, the key is how long can he sustain what he's doing? I spoke with a Ukrainian officer just the other day and he said, indefinitely, because, of course, President Putin doesn't have to answer to the Duma the way an American president would have to answer to the United States Congress. He doesn't have to worry about those things. And I'm not sure he can – I believe he can sustain it for a long time. I'm just not sure how much longer.

COHEN: Thank you, General.

One of the questions I've got – and there are several of them – one of them is you say that, Dr. Hill, he may be losing some of his popularity in Russia. What difference does it make

when he, as we've heard from different people, it's not so much who votes but who counts the votes. We've heard it in our country, scarily enough. You know, he counts the votes. And if you get too close to him, he puts you in the gulag. Why should he care?

HILL: Well, as strange as it may seem Putin cares very much because he is drawing all of his legitimacy from himself alone and the constitution. He's got no political party. And as we've already, you know, made very clear, that the Russian Duma, the parliament, doesn't, you know, matter quite so much. And what he's always had is his ratings, because it's also a signal to all the people around him who might actually be quite interested in his job over the longer term. Putin has been able to actually say to, you know, a lot of younger guys who might say, well, hang on, are you really going to stay out till 2036 as president? By that time you're going to be 84 years old. You'll have been in, you know, power in Russia longer than any other contemporary modern leader.

And, you know, we think that one of the reasons that he pushed out the possibility of staying for an extra two terms from 2024, which was supposed to his actual expiration date for the current presidency, was that he was worried that not only would he be a lame duck, but that people would be maneuvering around him trying to displace him or maybe make an early bid even for the presidency if they were selected as, you know, one of the potentials as a replacement. And so if he can keep pointing to major support in the ratings, in popularity polls, then that helps to boost his legitimacy and his own influence inside that tight circle around him. So it actually more important than it seems.

I mean, right now, of course, his ratings, even in, you know, the current Russian polls don't look that low from our perspective. I mean, from most American members of Congress or, you know, presidents, these would look like great ratings. But when you've pushed them into stratospheric levels – you know, to the upper 80 percentages – after the annexation of Crimea, the only place really to go is down. And so, you know, a lot of the way that he handles this – I mean, actually I agree with Lieutenant General Hodges. From our perspective he's actually lost quite a lot. But I think the important thing is for him to have seen to won – to have won. I think that's kind of what we're both trying to say here.

We have to be able to kind of allow him to have the space at home for declaring a win to give an offramp, because he has to be able to spin it. I mean, he doesn't have the media breathing down his neck, but he does have the people around him that he has to demonstrate strength and infallibility to. I mean, he may not appear to be the genius to, you know, us that he wants to be, but he has to be at home. Because his own position, in a way, and his support depends on that.

COHEN: You may have said it as well, Ambassador Taylor said it. He said that we've already been successful in the way we have dealt with him because we've deterred him. Well, when you say we've deterred him, I guess you're saying that he hasn't invaded?

HILL: Yeah, for now. I mean, that's, I think –

COHEN: So your thought is he would have invaded?

HILL: Well, yes –

COHEN: And if he would have invaded, why do you think he won't invade?

HILL: Well, he still could. So let's just be very, very clear about this. So I think Ambassador Taylor was very careful — “for now,” — because, you know, we were, in fact, anticipating some action, absolutely. We keep saying it's imminent because it really could happen every time. And if we go back – and I think this is where Ambassador Taylor and Lieutenant General Hodges could come in on this as well. If we look back to what happened in 2014, certainly the Russian intent was to push much further than the Donbas region, to push down to the areas around the Sea of Azov, port cities like Mariupol, to go to Kherson, which is further beyond the Crimea Peninsula, maybe as far as Odessa. To try to consolidate a hold over various proxy forces that would cut Ukraine off from the sea, and also link up with Crimea.

Very forceful action by the United States, together with its allies – especially after the downing of the Malaysian Airlines in 2014 – I think we can make a very strong case that it helped to stop Russia in their tracks, deter them somewhat, and force them to pull back. Also, because there was a strong response from the Ukrainian people in opposition to this. And I think what we've seen right now, for now – and I think it's very important to listen to what General Hodges and Ambassador Taylor said about keeping up this pressure, this unity, and the unity that you've all displayed, honestly, here in Congress in a bipartisan fashion – that might also not have factored into Putin's calculations, to be frank. I think in showing that we are actually determined to counter this, it's given him some pause.

COHEN: General Hodges, let me ask you this. What type of military powers does Ukraine have to stop a Soviet invasion, particularly from the north where they haven't historically been prepared, because Belarus was not a threat. And there's a lot of Russian forces there. And if Russia comes from the north, what does Ukraine have to respond? And how long could they – could they resist an invasion?

HODGES: Well, sir, the Ukrainian armed forces, of course, are significantly improved from 2014. They're not small. I mean, we're talking about 200,000 regular soldiers, plus reservists. And, candidly, I am not terribly concerned about there being 50-70,000 Russian troops along the northern border. I mean, when you think about the size of Ukraine, I mean, it's twice the size of Germany. And, sir, if you think about 100,000 troops, I mean, that would barely fill up the stadium where the University of Tennessee plays football, or the University of Michigan plays football. So that's a lot of people, but when you spread it out, the combat power doesn't look quite as daunting as when you just say the number.

They do not have enough forces right now deployed that could capture Kyiv, in my view. I believe that Ukrainian forces are going to fight like hell and that this will be a real bloody fight for the Russians. Now, they do have advantages, obviously, in their maritime fleet and their navy, and their air power, and certainly long-range systems. And whatever they do, it's going to be led by massive cyber that will everything difficult, disinformation that will confuse people and cause panic. And without a doubt, there's going to be sabotage. Already Ukrainian interior

forces have rolled up several different groups of saboteurs coming from Transnistria, Belarus, and from Russia – excuse me – Chechnya. That’s all going to happen. But I don’t see this massive assault that’s just going to roll over Ukrainian land forces.

COHEN: Thank you, General. We’re kind of coming down on time a bit. I want to ask one question, ask you for a brief response. One of the big issues seems to be sanctions before they invade, sanctions after they invade. Ambassador Taylor, what do you think’s more effective?

TAYLOR: Mr. Cohen, I think that the purpose of sanctions, unlike the purpose of movement of military forces, is best done after they move. And let me – if I can do two sentences on that. I know you want a short answer. Move military forces before they move – before the invasion comes in order to demonstrate that this is a serious deterrent. The goal is to deter him from invading Ukraine. And so move those forces, like the administration has decided to do this morning.

The sanctions, as you – as Congress knows very well – can go on in a hurry and go off very slowly. We’re thinking of Jackson-Vanik sanctions, that must have taken 20 years to remove. (Laughs.) That’s not a deterrent if you put those on in advance. It’s a deterrent if those serious sanctions are promised and detailed and are credibly coordinated with Europeans, so that when he does come across, they go on. But once they’re on, then if you do it in advance they lack – they lose their deterrent value.

COHEN: Thank you. And if you did them in advance, would that give Putin an opportunity to say the West has done this, and we need to proceed further, and then blame us for being the provocateur, in an economic sense?

TAYLOR: That’s the deterrent issue. That’s exactly it, Mr. Cohen.

COHEN: Thank you. I’m going to yield to – thank you.

And I’m going to yield to Mr. Wilson.

WILSON: Thank you very much, Chairman Cohen. And I want to thank all the witnesses today. I think it’s been very revealing. And truly it needs to be known how important this issue is to the people of the United States, beginning with the fact that we’ve got 10,000 Americans in Ukraine currently today who would be at risk.

But very positively, we have 1 million Ukrainian Americans who have been very important. I’m really pleased in the audience right here we have Congresswoman Victoria Spartz of Indiana. She is from – and I’m going to not pronounce Ukrainian correctly, but I mean to do this correctly. I’m sure she’ll let me know. Born in Nosivka, Chernihiv Oblast. And so we have a real-live Ukrainian American in Congress, and very outspoken, and very articulate on behalf of her love and affection for the people of Ukraine. And then, hey, in my home state of South Carolina, the former president of Newberry College, elected statewide as state superintendent of education, Mick Zais. And so Ukrainian Americans are very important.

And equally important, also we appreciate 2.4 million Russian Americans. They too are going to be insulted and humiliated by any conduct. And that's why I was so grateful, Ambassador, that you said you didn't feel like there would be an invasion, because it would be catastrophic for the people of Russia.

And then we get to another point – General Hodges correctly pointed out that this had an unintended effect of unifying NATO and the EU, but and possibly particularly having an effect on Finland and Sweden. But right here in the room today another consequence. It has unified Republicans and Democrats to be working together. And lightning's going to strike. I'm really pleased that Mr. Biden has changed course. Just in December, we were planning on \$40 million after an invasion, while in the meantime nearly a billion dollars of very important defensive materiel have been provided to the people of Ukraine. And so this needs to be understood.

And then, what other countries are directly affected? Poland; very important to me. My daughter-in-law is Polish American – Miskowicz (sp) – to see them so involved. And then Slovakia, the heart of Europe, adjacent to Ukraine, so significant. And then the Black Sea region with Romania, MK Air Base, and the American personnel there. And then we have Novo Selo in Bulgaria, with the American and NATO forces. And a consequence of this, it makes it more important than ever that we develop a port at Varna.

And so, over and over again, there are indications. And with that, truly, Dr. Hill, how in the world, with – we're no longer in a closed society, and the people of Russia aren't in a closed society either. And how in the world is this being kept from – and I know it's state-controlled media – but how is this being kept from the people, highly educated people of Russia? And what can we do to get a message to them that they would be the most victimized by an invasion of Ukraine?

HILL: I think this is a really important point, Congressman Wilson. I mean, you've very clearly delineated, you know, all of the countries that are going to be directly affected. I think actually in Slovakia right now, the second-largest ethnic group besides Slovaks is not actually Czechs but is Ukrainians because of Slovakia's border. I'm sure you were well aware of that.

WILSON: Yes.

HILL: And, of course, there are Ukrainians all over Europe now, especially over the last several years, as Ukrainians have got visa liberalization with Europe. And, you know, more broadly, we could have gone further afield. Obviously, Canada, to our north, has a very large population that has its roots in Ukraine, not least – I think she's still – Chrystia Freeland, the deputy prime minister and former foreign minister, classmate of mine from school as well.

So, you know, we have – as you've said, this is not a contained conflict by any means. There's also many other countries around the world – India, Japan – who are watching this very anxiously; the idea of a confrontation that would be depicted, at least from the Russian side, as a proxy war between Russia and the United States over Ukraine. China; we've talked about

Taiwan and our concerns, you know, ahead of the Beijing Olympics as well about how this might reverberate in the Asia-Pacific region.

I think this is actually one way in which we need to get this message across to Russia and to the Russian people is by these other channels. It's not so much that information is being kept out; it's the spin on the information. If you're looking at Russian television, what you see is – of course, is the depiction of the United States and NATO as the aggressors. A lot of the news is really more opinion than it is actually of news. You know, the kind of alternate information is, obviously, there on the internet for people to see or in their interactions, but it also has to be our private sector sending messages.

One of the things that I skipped over in my opening remarks but that's in the fuller testimony that I put into the record is my, really, concern about the position of the private sector. So we have many American companies invested in Russia. There's a lot of Russian investment in the United States. But really President Putin has emphasized investment in Europe and in European countries. Not only have we just seen Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary, going and making a huge gas deal in the middle of this crisis for his own domestic purposes; we saw Putin reaching out to heads of Italian business because he sees that Italy might be a weak link here.

We have to somehow, you know, within your interactions with your constituents, you know, those who might be investors – you know, particularly from major – you know, states like Texas, Congressman Veasey, where there's a – (inaudible) – oil and gas sector – figure out ways in which we can pass messages on. This is going to be disastrous for business, not just for international security. It's going to be disastrous at the human level. And then are all the ties and connections that have been built up in the last 30 years will be jeopardized by this.

We have – and there's signaling coming from London right now where a lot of the Russian oligarchs but a lot of ordinary Russians have now, you know, made their home and made their base there for business. I mean, not everyone in Russia is somehow related to the Kremlin and involved in nefarious dealings. We have students at universities, especially in Europe. All of this is going to be upended. And that's a way of spreading out this kind of information. We won't make much headway, unfortunately, through our own broadcasting into Russia. It'll have to be through our using these connections that Putin uses for his own purposes ourselves to pass on messages.

WILSON: Again, I want to thank each of the witnesses. And Chairman Cohen, thank you for your leadership, and Senator Cardin and Senator Wicker. Gosh, this has just been – the people of Europe but people of Ukraine and the people of Russia should know that, hey, we want no loss of life. Gosh, on our visit to Kyiv, gosh, what an incredible country that is, and such opportunities and possibilities for the people of Ukraine.

Thank you.

COHEN: Thank you, Mr. Wilson.



We're going to go next to Representative Veasey and then we'll go to Senator Tillis if he's with us, and then Representatives Moore and Gallego. We've only got theoretically about 25 minutes to go.

Representative Veasey, you're recognized.

VEASEY: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

Dr. Hill, I wanted to talk with you about some of the offramps. I think that you've heard a couple of offramp scenarios mentioned during testimony here earlier. And you've studied Putin. You understand his ego. You know what's acceptable to him, what's not. What, in your opinion, are some acceptable offramps that have been offered and some that you think are just completely out of the question?

HILL: Well, I mean, part of the problem – I mean, you've mentioned the word ego – is that it has to look like a win for Putin. And I think that that's kind of what Ambassador Taylor and I were trying to sketch out here. If he can say to the Russian people, in this environment in which, obviously, there's a lot of slant in the media – and, you know, obviously, the Kremlin can shape that in a major way, that they have used to good effect their military force that they have by threatening Europe. They've got our attention. They've got our full and undivided attention. They've pushed us to the negotiating table.

That in itself can certainly buy us some time for some more diplomacy to then craft something that might be a bit more meaningful as an offramp, which is going to be tricky, however, because, as we've already stated and as the administration has stated, NATO has stated, we are not going to compromise on the sovereignty of Ukraine. That's not ours to compromise. And we're not going to compromise on NATO's open-door policy, because for Finland, Sweden and other countries that are potentially aspirants for NATO candidacy, that's very important. I mean, members of NATO, other members of the alliance, do not want to see the open door for NATO closed, although they may actually have some hesitancy about Ukraine and Georgia and other former Soviet states that might seek to join.

If there is any change, that has to be Ukraine's to decide, not just NATO trying to close that door, even though, of course, it is a consensus organization. So that's not on the agenda right now. But Russia has been pushing for a serious discussion of the European security for years. And they made a proposal in 2008 in Berlin when Dmitri Medvedev came there, and it was in the context of the OSCE.

So for the members of this commission, this could be something very important to consider about how we might shape and formulate a major discussion about European security architecture that would then include confidence-building measures. I think we've already talked about many of these, as you've suggested. The disposition of forces; we have – the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty is kind of now in abeyance. Since 2015, I don't think we've had any kinds of discussions about this.

Obviously, Russia has made a big show with its novel nuclear weapons of wanting a debate about the future of nuclear missiles, both tactical and intermediate, on European territory. We were on the verge of talking to them about commitments not to actually station missiles or further missiles in Europe. I mean, that was all part of a discussion that we were moving forward that is, obviously, being put a halt to right now.

So there are many things that we could do. But it will have to be framed from Putin in such a way that he can credibly go about to not just the people around him but to the Russian public and say I got a win. And that we might not actually want to give him. So part of that will be, you know, dependent on us as well.

VEASEY: Yeah. No, absolutely. And I also wanted to ask you as well, you know, the oligarchs have been mentioned a couple of times in the testimony likewise and the tremendous amount of money that they've invested in different places in Europe. Can they be used – and I know that, you know, aside from cutting off their money, if you were to suspend their visas or make it hard for them to travel throughout Europe, is there a way to really put pressure on them and have it get back to Putin and perhaps have him back off through those guys since they also have money and he's very influenced by money and oil?

HILL: Yeah. I mean, look, you also here in Congress and in the Senate have been discussing various ways of tackling illicit finance. I mean, we had the revelations from the Pandora papers most recently about all of the offshore zones, including places like South Dakota, which I think was probably a surprise for most people, probably including members of Congress from South Dakota, that were being used as, you know, places where shell companies, you know, can set themselves up. And, you know, those are the kinds of instruments that are used by Russian oligarchs and others, you know, basically to hide money, to safeguard money.

But also ultimately, you know, they tried to make strategic investments, as I've said already, in companies here in the United States. We have to use the CFIUS process to make sure that that's not being leveraged in any way. There's an awful lot of things that we can do to clean up our own act, to enforce our own regulations. I think here in the U.S. we've been much more forward leaning on the federal and congressional and Senate level than, you know, many of our counterparts have been in Europe. A lot of it has to be done on the state-and-local-government level as well, to be frank. But we are going to have to work with our European allies.

The Brits actually are a real weak link in this. Now, the British House of Commons is about to do a series of hearings in the next week – perhaps you could reach out to some of your counterparts – looking specifically at similar legislation to the legislation we already have here in the United States that we passed in the NDAA, for example. They're trying to figure out how they can also close up loopholes, make it more difficult for Russian oligarchs and the Kremlin themselves to use the British legal system as well as the financial system. There's an awful lot of dirty money and illicit finance floating around in London. And then, you know, more broadly in Europe, we have to be working with our European allies, the European Union as well, to figure out how they can put some of the processes to CFIUS in place.

There's an awful lot that we can do. And I think there's an awfully large role for Congress. I mean, you already set the tone, Congress did, with the international Magnitsky bill, for example. So you yourselves, as members of the Congress, can also drive some of the other efforts in our European partner countries.

VEASEY: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

COHEN: Thank you, sir.

Senator Tillis is with us. He's recognized. And he's a proud, proud North Carolinian and proud of Bojangles chicken. I just wish Bojangles chicken might have had the contract to feed all those troops. That's got to be some awesome logistics and a whole lot of meals.

Senator Tillis, you're recognized.

(Pause.)

Is he not with us? His camera's on? Is he on?

STAFF: His camera's off.

COHEN: His camera's off? All right.

Representative Gwen Moore, are you with us?

MOORE: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much.

COHEN: You can send us some bratwursts.

MOORE: (Laughs.) I sure will.

Listen, thank you so much. And this is – I can't think of – I just want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, all of the commissioners. Our staff are doing a tremendous job with all of our materials. I could not have gotten a better briefing on this subject than from the witnesses that we've had today.

And I do have some questions. Would our strategies or tactics differ if we thought, for example, that, you know, Russia was on the brink of some sort of military action or if we thought that they were really calling the bluff, as it were, of the NATO coalition and the Section 5 provisions? I mean, because after all, I think, Dr. Hill, you have really sort of laid out all of the weak links that we are experiencing. We've got so-called NATO members like Hungary and Turkey that are flaky. We have Germany being concerned about its own fossil-fuel resources. France is about to experience an election. And, of course, there are always concerns there.

Would our tactics and strategies change were – you know, were we to focus on really ensuring that this alliance is solid? And even we, as the United States, have shown some light of day in terms of our resolve, saying, yeah, if it's a small incursion we'll do this, or we'll do that; we're going to send troops, but the troops aren't going to do anything.

And so I guess I – you know, if it's OK to talk tactically about what – where we should be putting our energy. Is that to shore up the NATO alliance, or is it to try to put those units on the borders? You know, Belarus is right there to be a staging ground. So I just wonder strategically what we ought to focus on. Thank you.

Dr. Hill, and Lieutenant General.

HILL: Yes. And I also think it would be important to have Ambassador Taylor talk about this as well because, I mean, he's –

MOORE: Thank you. Yes.

HILL: – been involved, you know, very closely with much of this too.

You know, I think this is really an excellent way of laying this out. We've covered every base. And you know, of course, we do have a difference. It would be interesting to hear, you know, how that came out in Ukraine with some of our European allies and partners about – and I think actually some of our Western European partners have been a bit of skepticism on the part of the French, for example, about whether this is an elaborate bluff.

Well, if it is an elaborate bluff, it's also a very expensive bluff on the part of Putin. This is the first time that we've seen forces being moved from the Russian far east, as was mentioned at the very beginning, and certainly since the end of the Cold War, for example, to the borders with Ukraine. And I'd like to get General Hodges to comment on, you know, what we've seen here.

My experience also of Putin is that he usually – if he threatens, he usually intends to act in some fashion. And the Russians themselves have threatened this military technical action; so giving themselves a lot of options, you know. Notwithstanding what General Hodges has said about the unlikelihood of being able to do a massive full invasion that would take Kyiv, there's a lot of options that Putin has laid out for himself there, including, you know, kind of further repetition – this gets to that point about another incursion, which President Zelensky of Ukraine said there's no such thing as an incursion when it's your territory that's being taken, the kind of salami tactics of one move and then waiting and taking some more moves. There are many things that he can do.

Each time, you know, people have thought that Putin was bluffing – Georgia, for example, in 2008 – he moved in. In Syria, we weren't sure whether they were going to intervene on behalf of Assad, and they did. We've had a firefight between paramilitary forces. Again, so they can also use subversion; in Syria in 2018, when members of the Wagner paramilitary group of Russian contract forces fired on our Special Forces and we had a whole firefight with the

Russians behind the scenes. So we should be very careful about the idea of this being a bluff. But I know that many of our allies are a bit skeptical about what they see as happening.

So in the larger strategic context, which I think my colleagues and I have already laid out, we need to keep this up. We need to keep up our response as if we're taking this absolutely 100 percent seriously. Call the bluff, as you were, because, you know, in past practice Putin often hasn't bluffed and has done something. And so deterring on the military front is very important. As you've said, Belarus is right next to NATO country Poland.

Russia has also raised questions about a threat to its territory from Poland and from Lithuania because of the exclave of Russian territory, Kaliningrad, the former Königsberg, which Russia took as territory on the Baltic Sea during World War II. That, of course, borders Lithuania and Poland. And Belarus is the main supply corridor for Kaliningrad as a sort of military base from Russian territory as well as from the Baltic Sea.

So this is a very tense situation there. There's lots of saber rattling going on there. We have to take this 100 percent seriously.

Clearly also on cyber, we see that Anne Neuberger is going out to deal with the cyber front. And we really have to work very hard, as Ambassador Taylor said, in making the threats of sanctions very credible, along with our allies.

I think this major point of how do we deal with Hungary and, you know, some of our other allies that may be trying to choose a bilateral route is going to be rather complicated, because Putin clearly, in making this bid for each individual OSCE member to write in their own sort of postcard about how they see indivisible security is trying to pick countries off. So I think trying to maintain unity is pretty critical.

And I really liked, Congressman Wilson, what you said too about the unity here in the House and in the Senate. I don't think honestly that Putin did expect that, given, you know, some of our polarization in parties on infighting on many other topics. I think we've surprised them. And I think we need to keep on doing that.

TAYLOR: Congresswoman Moore, I would agree that President Putin is probably surprised at the unity, as Dr. Hill just said, not just in the United States and not just in Ukraine, but also in Europe. I think he's probably surprised that his saber-rattling, his movement of all these troops to the borders of Ukraine, he's probably surprised that President Zelensky has not caved or has not been intimidated. He's probably surprised that the United States hasn't been intimidated or surprised – or intimidated. This is a strong showing by the United States, by Ukraine, together with the Europeans. We have to remember the Europeans have reauthorized sanctions every six months since – for the last eight years since the Russians invaded. And I'm sure President Putin was surprised by that. So if he's thinking that we're bluffing, that's a mistake.

There is the question that Dr. Hill just raised and that is, is he bluffing? And we can't assume he's bluffing because he's invaded before. He's surprised us before. He invaded

Ukraine in 2014. But what we can say is he's been looking at the unity; he's been looking at the possibility of severe sanctions; he's been looking at the additional reinforcements that the United States is already sending into east Europe. He didn't expect this. So that's the bluff that he has to worry about.

MOORE: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

COHEN: Thank you so much.

Representative Gallego is on and I'd like to recognize him and then Senator Cardin's back and he'll take the chair and he will close out after Representative Gallego's questions.

GALLEGO: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, I was actually just voting on a markup. Am I next?

COHEN: You're not next, you're now.

GALLEGO: I'm now. Even better! (Laughs.) Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank the chairman. Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today. Like my colleagues here, I'm very deeply concerned by Russia's increasingly belligerent behavior and large-scale military buildup on the Ukrainian border. I saw this firsthand. Just as Mr. Wilson had said earlier, we went to a CODEL in Ukraine as part of my subcommittee chairmanship on the Armed Services Committee, and we know that Russia's directly threatening the sovereignty of Ukraine and the democracy by its people and its ability and security that Europe has enjoyed since the end of the Cold War, all to rewrite European security.

We cannot forget that, most importantly, this crisis is one that Russia itself has manufactured, all for its own gain. We must continue to strengthen deterrence and must do so in coordination with our allies and our partners.

My first question is for Dr. Hill. Thank you for your testimony and for your long-standing courage to speak truth to power. I appreciate the detail in which you outlined Russian thinking in your written testimony, including the advantages the Kremlin perceives vis-a-vis the United States and the West. I wanted to ask you to describe the flipside of it. What do you see as Russia's greatest vulnerabilities, and both where, and with Nord Stream 2 as an example, how do you think we can do a better job exploiting Russian weaknesses with our allies and partners?

HILL: Well, thank you very much, Representative Gallego. I think the biggest vulnerabilities are with time for Russia, so I think this is one of the reasons why Putin is acting now. A vulnerability always comes in Russia and in other places, too, when you have a presidential election. And, you know, we had a question before from Congressman Cohen about Putin's popularity and, you know, whether this really matters, and that, in fact, does. So, you know, one vulnerability, really, is in the legitimacy of the system because Putin in 2020 basically pushed through his amendment to extend his presidential terms and there were some questions about, really, the validity of that, even from the Russian constitutional perspective. And, you know, all eyes are really on him and his inner circle as to whether they can carry off a smooth

transition into the next phase of his presidency, or if he, in fact, has a successor that he wants to put in place. And we've seen what happened in Kazakhstan where President Nazarbayev handed off to President Tokayev and we've just seen, you know, what looks like some really nasty protests in response to, you know, kind of socioeconomic problems there but also a power struggle behind the scenes, which often happens when you change over. And so, you know, I think that Putin and the people around him are a little bit worried about their version of 2024 and what might happen.

And also, you've mentioned energy. Time is on Russia's side right now for energy because Russia has, you know, very effectively continued to dominate the gas sector in a number of particular European countries, including Germany and, most notably, Hungary, Viktor Orbán being in Moscow to essentially sign a massive gas deal for cheaper gas, which Russia also hopes will give political influence, and of course, that's why we've all been concerned about Nord Stream 2. But over time, Russia knows that its dominance in the European energy sector will change. The Europeans haven't done a great job of gas storage because of the COVID pandemic, not really sure how the economy would bounce back. It's a cold winter. They're worried about gas shortages and other energy shortages, and Russia hopes that of course will mean that there will be much reluctance to put sanctions on the energy sector and there will be a lot of pressure from the European energy companies and consumers and, you know, governments against sanctions.

So that is a vulnerability over the longer term. The more that we can push for diversification of the European energy sector, and successive U.S. administrations have done just that, the more that we can also, you know, stick true to our own democracy and, you know, our own free and fair elections. I mean, that will also be signaling. I mean, the Russians, unfortunately, you know, tend to kind of point to weaknesses elsewhere as an excuse for their own messing about in their domestic politics, but there is a vulnerability ahead for Putin in his reelection and pushing forward. Obviously, that's why Alexei Navalny, the Russian opposition figure, is sitting in jail because, you know, Putin's clearly frightened of him and the challenge that he poses. And ultimately, just like Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus, Putin's worried about the Russian people and their own feelings about, you know, how a war might play out, their own socioeconomic concerns. This could be a distraction from the pandemic. Russia hasn't fared very well with COVID. Just, you know, like many other countries, the government hasn't really handled it. They have actually had a backlash to their own propaganda against vaccinations. The Sputnik vaccine, although it's been effective, has not been as effective as the vaccines that have been produced here and in Europe. And the propaganda that the Russians perpetrate has come back to bite them. They have very low vaccine rates in Russia. So there's all kinds of things that – climate change is also a major problem for Russia looking ahead as well.

So this is why Putin's trying to act now. But I think those vulnerabilities are things that we can press on later but with the aim, of course, of trying to engage Russia. I mean, we should want to see a better relationship over time with Russia.

I think there are also vulnerabilities – and I hope Lieutenant General Hodges is still on here to talk to this – in the Russian military as well. Russia makes a big show of its novel nuclear weapons, its strategic nuclear arsenal, because Russia does feel very vulnerable against

our conventional forces. And I think a lot of this posturing, Russia is, of course, strong when you look at it from the point of view of the Ukrainian military, but when you look at the full array of NATO forces, Russia is still at a major disadvantage on the conventional front, and so I think that that is part of an element of this as well.

GALLEGO: Well, and General Hodges, if you could talk a little bit about that, but I also want to ask you what you describe in your written testimony as a Russian way of war. Russia has been relying on gray-zone techniques to exert influence, whether that's launching cyber campaigns or spreading disinformation. How would you assess the U.S. response to these Russian activities? And are there certain steps that we should take in order to be more effective operating, potentially, and fighting in the gray zone?

HODGES: Thanks, sir. First of all, as far as vulnerabilities, obviously I would like to associate myself with everything that Dr. Hill has said. But two things that are real vulnerabilities: They don't have any friends. I mean, they may have – Prime Minister Orbán, of course, will come sucking up a little bit, but they don't have allies. We've got 29 allies plus real partners with real capability all focused on this threat. That is the main vulnerability that we should be exploiting to isolate them and make sure we don't lose that advantage. And then, down inside their formation, even though they have done a lot to modernize, it still is about 50 percent a conscript army, which means that you've got a wide range of capabilities. And, you know, we can get caught up in they have 75 or 80 of these BTGs, the battalion tactical groups, but these are not like the battalion from the 101st Airborne Division or a Marine battalion; this is a different kind of capability. So we should not be overwhelmed by that.

In terms of the Russian way of war, we continue to be surprised – this is the collective “we,” not just the United States but the West – we continue to be surprised by what they do because we just can't imagine that in the year 2022 that a European leader would do the things that they do, the murder, the targeted assassinations, the use of cyber not only to interfere with our elections and cause us to lose trust in our institutions, but also to ruin people's lives, smashing their financial institutions and so on.

So when we get into a war mindset – that doesn't mean kinetic, but we have to be in the same frame of mind that they are, or at least recognize that they are in a war footing all the time, whether it's disinformation or nuclear weapons and everything in between – then we can take advantage of all of our assets and dominate them.

GALLEGO: Mr. Chairman, do I have time for one more question?

CARDIN: Yes, you do, but make it brief; we have other members that want to speak.

GALLEGO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is for Ambassador Taylor. I wanted to ask you about our recent – or your recent trip to Ukraine. As I mentioned, our CODEL was there recently and I was impressed by the transformation of the Ukrainian military. But I believe that we can and should do more to make them obviously lethal and create deterrence. Is there something that you have from takeaways



there that we could be doing to make them, you know, more lethal and create, you know, at least some deterrence in the minds of Russia?

TAYLOR: Thank you, Congressman. Yes. General Hodges and I heard President Zelensky answer that question and he said he wanted to increase the size of his military, he wants to be able to have a larger military, and he wants to double their pay. And for both – to do both of those functions, both of those tasks, he needs funds. He needs money. He needs financial support. He's got the intent, the determination, and the military. You saw it as well. I was very glad that you were there last month. You saw it as well. They are determined. They are overmatched. The Ukrainians are overmatched by the Russians, and President Zelensky wants to begin to address that by hiring and recruiting more soldiers for them, and he wants to pay them better. So that's the one thing – that's one new thing that – and, by the way, just the day after General Hodges and I saw him, he put out a decree to increase the size of the army and to pay them better. So that he is intending to do.

GALLEGO: Excellent. Thank you.

And I yield back.

CARDIN: Thank you.

WILSON: Mr. Chairman, very briefly –

CARDIN: Congressman Wilson?

WILSON: Congressman Gallego is being very modest. On our visit, he was so effective in expressing support for the people of Ukraine that a member of the Russian Duma on Russian television announced that he should be kidnapped and brought to Moscow for trial. What a backhanded compliment.

GALLEGO: Thank you. (Laughs.)

CARDIN: (Laughs.)

GALLEGO: Thank you, Mr. Wilson.

CARDIN: Joining a distinguished list of U.S. congressmen and senators who have been put on that list. (Laughter.)

Senator Tillis.

TILLIS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador Taylor, in your opening comments, you were talking about how you thought that the threat of an imminent invasion maybe is reduced and that there is an interest in negotiation. I'm trying to understand why on earth we would accept any – I mean, they've laid a

predicate through a very provocative posture. And now they're saying, if we behave or agree to something differently – what is the rational basis for us getting into kind of a hostage-like-negotiation discussion with them? It just doesn't seem like it's a good-faith discussion, so why am I wrong?

TAYLOR: Senator, you're absolutely right. While Russia has all those troops on the border, it is a threat to Ukraine. It's holding a gun to Ukraine's head, the hostage, while they negotiate on these other issues. So in order to have any kind of legitimate conversation, productive conversation, they have to demobilize. They have to send their troops, forces back to barracks, back to their home stations. So that's number one.

Number two, if the threat of their invasion has gone down, and I think it probably has, to some degree – I mean, we see a lot of – we see less of the imminent rhetoric that we're going to – if you don't answer right away, we're going to use military tactical means to get you to answer. That's gone. They're now talking about – first of all, they're saying, well, we never intended to invade, which we of course don't believe, but that's what they would have us believe. But they also now say that they're willing to have this negotiation. Again, as long as the gun goes down from Ukraine's head, we can have this negotiation. And there are at least two areas that would make sense to negotiate, from our standpoint, from NATO's standpoint. And they are military exercises. If we had visibility into their exercise – they say that all these troops on the border of Ukraine and up into Belarus, they're there for exercises. Well, if we had had some notice of that exercise, that would be more credible. Totally incredible at this point. But that is an area where we could benefit. That is, if they were to give us notice of their exercises, and invite our people to observe them, in return for – we, NATO would tell them when we're going to have exercises and invite Russian officers to observe our exercises, that would be an increase in stability and security for both sides. The second area is on intermediate-range nuclear weapons, which, again, those conversations had already started. We'd be happy to have that conversation. So those are areas, again, if the gun goes down from the Ukrainians' head.

TILLIS: Thank you for that.

General Hodges, I actually agree with the decision to deploy some of our 82nd Airborne to Poland and Germany. Do you all believe that that increased troop posture is wise in the current conditions?

HODGES: Sir, I absolutely do, for a couple reasons. Number one, it demonstrates will and resolve. When we take our highest readiness forces and send them over to Europe for an undetermined amount of time, that demonstrates that we're serious about this, because obviously this is not cheap or easy, and then also I think brings along other allies who will want to follow the American example. So that's important. And then, of course, this is prudent. You don't want to wait till a crisis to then decide you need to have more troops over there. So I think this was a prudent move by the department to get capability that's much closer, because we could be sure, if there is a no-kidding fight, we will not have uncontested passage of the Atlantic or flying in there either, whether it's kinetic or cyber. So I was really happy to see this.

TILLIS: I agree. And I think that it's also – we had a discussion with the ambassadors from the Baltic states and a diplomatic representative from Poland on a call earlier today. I think it's also just important to reaffirm our commitment to our NATO allies.

Ms. Hill, one thing that I'm curious about with President Zelensky's comments about – using my words, not his – kind of tone down the rhetoric; you're not helping me. On the one hand, I can understand that because he's literally at ground zero, the hostage, but on the other hand, I think that some of this is necessary to wake up the American people and the global community about the real threat there. How do we thread the needle and not make it harder for President Zelensky to do his job but also keep our foot on the accelerator?

HILL: Well, I think General Hodges and Ambassador Taylor can speak to this because I think you've put that question, you know, directly to him in the meeting; the two of them met with him just a couple days ago. I think, you know, the administration and others have tried to explain this very well, but as you said, you know, the broader public is probably scratching their head and thinking, hang on, what's going on here; why are we saying, the United States, that this is imminent and the British are saying the same, and the guy who's sitting right there on the border is saying, no need to panic, nothing happening? In part, this obviously is that real concern about panic and people actually already crossing Ukraine's borders into other countries in anticipation of a conflict, because we've already seen, of course, what happens when Russia invades, in Donbas, and there's been many people displaced. Tens of thousands of people have left the Donbas region for Ukraine itself; some have gone into Russia. So Ukraine already has a problem with internally displaced people and refugees.

The other point is, of course, the economy, and in fact, when we think about what Putin might have already got out of this massive movement of troops it might be exactly this, which is ruining Ukraine's current chances of turning around its economy. Ukraine was on the verge of really getting its macroeconomic situation stabilized. I mean, we've all been worrying about this for some considerable period of time, finding a new arrangement with the International Monetary Fund, starting to get investment. It really looked as if Ukraine was getting its act together economically. And, you know, just as that moment starts to appear, you then see the looming forces on the border. And I don't think that is also coincidental. I think that Russia was starting to worry that actually Ukraine was looking a bit more successful than it had been previously. There's a lot of infighting going on with Ukrainian oligarchs and businesspeople, you know, kind of in and around Zelensky and the former presidents in Ukraine. But nonetheless, Ukraine was looking more promising as a place for international investment.

And so I think Zelensky is very mindful of that right now. I mean, a run on the currency, the crash of the economy, investors not just putting things on pause but, you know, pulling out entirely, and that could be one serious win for the Russians, you know, if nothing else happens, that they scared everyone away from investing in Ukraine because, of course, Moscow's been trying to point to Ukraine as a basket case, as not worthy of investment, and, you know, basically that Ukraine is not going to succeed. So I think that's actually a large part of it. And as you said, we're going to have to try to thread the needle on that one. How can we kind of reassure the markets that, you know, Ukraine is a long-term good investment at the same time as we're trying to warn everybody that they're at risk of imminent invasion from Russia?

And I think you addressed this directly with President Zelensky, correct?

TAYLOR: We did. Senator, if I may? We asked President Zelensky about this apparent difference in the perception. He's very clear. He understands very well what the forces are. He gets the same – almost the same briefing from his intelligence agencies as President Biden does. President Zelensky said he was very happy, by the way, with his relationship with President Biden. He said that there was an area of improvement on message discipline, on message consistency between the two governments, but he's very happy with the way that's working. And, as Dr. Hill just said, he wants to – President Zelensky wants to present a firm posture, a firm face, a firm stance as he faces down President Putin. And he and President Biden – President Zelensky and President Biden – have held firm. They've not been rattled, they've not been intimidated, and they've been together on this, and they – and President Zelensky in particular wants to demonstrate calm, determination, and he's very pleased with the results of all of the NATO allies who are providing him with weapons. And, as you said, there's an important role to be played on demonstrating the concern in order to get other allies to provide those weapons. That's succeeding. In particular, in the last week, that's been succeeding. So President Zelensky wants to project calm, concern. He's got his military very focused on this issue. There's no doubt. And he wants to enlarge them. He wants to grow that military, as he's just indicated. So that's his direction at this point.

TILLIS: Thank you all. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's great to see you, Congressman Cohen.

COHEN: Good to see you. Thanks.

CARDIN: Well, this has been a very, very productive hearing, significant participation by members of the Commission, and I appreciate that and I think it speaks to the quality of our witnesses and the content of your testimony and response to questions.

General Hodges, I just really want to reinforce the issue of unity among our partners, and you mentioned that, the fact that President Biden's sending some of our troops over as part of a NATO effort to make it clear the unity in NATO and protection of the security alliance. I am concerned, as you've already pointed out, to Mr. Orbán's presence in Moscow and the image that that portrayed, but more importantly his conduct over a period of time that questions his long-term commitment to the NATO alliance. So I am concerned about that issue, but it appears to date that it's had no noticeable impact on NATO's resolve, so I think at this stage it appears like – if you have a different view on that, please let me know.

I do want to give you my own observations. You mentioned Germany and Germany has a lot of different interests. We recognize that. Nord Stream 2 has been an area that we've been in total disagreement with with Germany. But from the conversations that have taken place as recently as this week, there appears to be solid commitment by Germany to NATO's mission, as well as unity on additional sanctions against Russia for further incursions. So I'm pleased to see the unity that we have and I think that message has not been lost on Mr. Putin.

I think the comments you made, Dr. Hill, about the damage done already to Ukraine is real. I mean, I think that it's true, when you're a country that doesn't have total control over your whole country and you're being threatened by an enemy that is trying to bring down your government, that very much affects the confidence of investment in your country. But to a certain degree, the sanctions that have been imposed against Mr. Putin and Russia likewise affects Russia's viability, and if they do further incursions, there's going to be much more severe sanctions, as we all know, including the banking SWIFT issues, which we've talked about.

And what really, I think, gets Mr. Putin's attention are the personal sanctions and we are very prepared, working with our allies, to expand the use of the individual sanctions with Russia. I've made this comment and I know right now our major effort is to try to avoid further incursions, but Russia already has violated international norms; they are already subject to sanctions and they're already subject – could be subject to additional sanctions, for which they've already done. And I think that needs to be under consideration. But our immediate point is to try to eliminate the immediate threat, so we recognize all of that.

So I just think this testimony has been extremely helpful and I thank you for that. If you have any final comments, fine, or if any of my colleagues – I see that Representative Wilson has a comment.

WILSON: I just agree with you so much. Again, can you imagine that Mr. Putin has brought Republicans and Democrats together in such a warm way? But another country affected that needs to be appreciated is Turkey, with the Crimea, with the Russian occupation of portions of Georgia on both sides in the Black Sea. Our great ally of Turkey, which has significant influence in Central Asia, is being affected and we just appreciate so much our 70-year alliance of NATO with Turkey. Thank you.

CARDIN: Right. And as we've pointed out, if you look at those that are on the list that Russia has interest to make sure we are not invited to their country, you'll find there are equal number of Democrats and Republicans, so we're together in that effort.

Congressman Cohen?

COHEN: I just want to say one last thing and that's – I presume Mr. Putin may watch this or hear about it. I want to make a direct appeal to Mr. Putin. Please, pour yourself a vodka, get a blini, have some caviar, enjoy the Winter Olympics, get your thrills vicariously, watch your athletes perform. Hopefully, they'll win some gold medals. I'm sure they will; they're great athletes. Russia has great athletes and great people. Chill.

CARDIN: That's a nice final comment. (Laughter.)

General Hodges, anything further that you want to respond to?

HODGES: Mr. Chairman, thank you. I just want to say, we have got to get ambassadors in post.

CARDIN: Yes.

HODGES: It makes it so difficult for our country to carry out our foreign policy when we don't have our diplomats in post. And I – I mean, I'm not naïve, I understand the process, but we are paying a price right now by not having all of our posts filled. So thank you for your support there.

CARDIN: Absolutely agree. And there is a lot of fault to go around – the Biden administration was not that fast in naming ambassadors and still has not named ambassadors to some key positions, and there's been individual senators, Republican senators, who have put holds on just about every nomination, which means that we have to go through a lengthy process on confirmation, which is totally uncalled for. But we recognize that. We've raised that issue many times. We do think it's a national security concern to get confirmed ambassadors. And I have to respond because I'm the only senator that's here right now.

Any further comments, Dr. Hill?

Anything further, Ambassador Taylor?

Thank you all very much. Again, we appreciate all of your participation. And with that, the Commission will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:50 p.m., the hearing ended.]